

# REFLECTIONS

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UPON THE

PRESENT NEGLECT

OF THE

Public Worship *of* GOD.

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By the AUTHOR of the LIFE *of* DAVID  
King *of* ISRAEL.

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**D**AVID's exceeding sollicitude, and amazing expence, to establish the public worship of GOD in his capital, in a way worthy of it, together with the raptures expressed in his attendance upon it, naturally suggest this reflection to the thinking reader: if the establishment of the divine worship, and attendance upon it, were then of such inestimable value, and incredible delight amidst the height of all worldly glory and grandeur; What can have sunk both so low, in the estimation of the present age that few men of high condition are

#### 4 On the PRESENT NEGLECT

found to have any regard for either? And our wonder increases, when we find, upon inquiry, that the setting apart one day in seven, as a day of rest from the labours of life, and a day of attendance upon the public worship of GOD, is a practice of such great antiquity, and universal extent throughout the antient world, that learned men have justly concluded the institution to have been as old as the creation; and therefore enjoined by *Moses*, not as a new command, but as a duty of careful attendance to one already well-known, *Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy* \*. And they are confirmed in this judgment, by finding it, upon reflection, an institution every way worthy of infinite wisdom and goodness; and absolutely necessary to the well-being of the world. And, indeed, there is good reason to doubt, whether, without the benefit of this institution, the growing race of mankind would ever have attained to the strength and perfection even of their

\* *Exod.* chap. xx. ver. 8.



animal nature; and all the reason in the world to believe, that the labouring part of mankind (which are, at least, ninety-nine in an hundred) would not otherwise live out half their days; *their strength* would then be literally *labour and sorrow*; they could live but a very little time, and they would spend even the little they did live, in added misery; and at the last have abundant reason to take up *Jacob's* complaint (before *Pharaoh*) in the strictest sense, *Few and evil have been the days of the years of my pilgrimage.* And, as for the higher orders of men, if any such could subsist in such a state of things (as I am well satisfied they could not), they would, however, subsist to no higher or nobler purposes than the *wild ass's colt in the wilderness.*

FORASMUCH, then, as this command is so evidently of divine institution, and infinite importance to mankind; Can there be matter of more astonishment to a thinking man, than to see this institution so openly, so avowedly profaned, in so serious and wise a nation as this,

by almost all orders and degrees of men amongst us, but especially those of higher condition, by those who affect to be called, The better sort; and by them as openly and avowedly despised, and trampled underfoot, as if the command were reversed to them, and they were bound in conscience to remember the Sabbath-day, only in order to profane it; to sacrifice it to every vice, and every vanity, that comes into their hearts! insomuch that every good Christian may now take up *Jeremiah's* lamentation, with very little change; *The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate; her priests sigh;—her adversaries are the chief, her enemies prosper; for the Lord hath afflicted her—the adversaries saw her, and did mock at her Sabbaths.* And therefore I hope it may be deemed matter of no small moment, to inquire seriously into the causes and consequences of this calamity.

Now one main source of this evil is  
Pride,

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IN an humble heart, gratitude naturally keeps pace with the blessings bestowed upon it; and, of consequence, the piety of a good man rises and expands, in proportion to his enlargement and exaltation: whereas, in an haughty heart, the effect is the direct contrary. Every success, to a man of that make, is the effect of his own wisdom; and every advantage the reward of his own merit: consequently there can be no room for piety, or gratitude to GOD, where every thing but self is excluded. And therefore, so far are such men from being thankful to their Maker, for the blessings and advantages they enjoy above other men; that they live so in the world, as if they verily believed GOD did not govern it. --- These are literally and strictly *the ungodly of this world!* And the *Psalmist* hath, long since, left us their true character: *The ungodly is so proud, that he careth not for God, neither is God in all his thoughts.* By a long disuse of devotion, and open neglect of divine worship, he gradually forgets every duty

8.    *On the* PRESENT NEGLECT

duty he owes his Maker ; and, when he hath, for some time, habituated himself to live without GOD in the world, he then begins to doubt his very existence ; he then begins to forget, that *in him we live, and move, and have our being*. And thus the neglect of GOD's public worship naturally leads from one degree of irreligion to another, until it end in atheism.

BUT pride is not the only origin of this evil ; its sources are various : the necessary avocation of business is pleaded by some men of learned professions, whom I am very unwilling to censure ; and the care of health, by some of the other sex ; of whom it is remarkable, that they can attend all other assemblies of mankind, at all hours of the day and night, where the danger is manifestly greater. And, as some of these assemblies fall on the eve of the Sabbath, the late hours kept in them confound all order of time ; and so the next day's hour of public worship is slept away, and  
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the duty they owe to GOD sacrificed to vanity and the world.

BUT one sure and principal source of this spirit of irreligion, and neglect of the public worship of GOD, is Travelling.

IT is the common infirmity of people of fortune, to imagine, that the education of their children is never complete, until they have seen the world, as they call it; nor is the opinion altogether ungrounded: their error is, that they think they cannot too soon hurry them into it; and they succeed accordingly. For, being thus sent out, early, young, unexperienced, unprincipled, and uninformed, into the midst of foreign fashions, vanities, and vices of every kind, they are early imbued with them all. Nor is it possible it should be otherwise, when they are only fitted to converse with the giddy, the light, the libertine part of the world, from whom they can learn nothing else: the consequence of which is, that sensual pleasures, foreign fopperies, amusements, and luxuries, become the business of their lives for ever



TO *Of the* PRESENT NEGLECT

after ; whereas, would parents wait until their sons were of riper years, until their minds were properly enlarged, and enlightened with liberal knowlege ; and their principles of virtue, and true religion, fixt upon the same foundation ; they would then be fitted to converse with the serious and thinking part of the world they visited ; to observe their manners ; and to be improved by their virtue and wisdom, if they had any ; and, if they had none, to be amended even by their vices, and informed by their folly and ignorance.

NOR is this all --- for, being early sent out into countries where a religion different from their own is professed, consequently where they cannot attend upon the public worship of GOD, they acquire early habits of neglecting his public worship : and, if they are not attended with some serious men of a religious character (which is very rarely the case), they acquire early habits of neglecting all the divine ordinances, until religion becomes no part of their business, *neither*

is God in all their thoughts. And thus it comes to pass, that, returning home, in this condition, as their travelling airs, and foreign fopperies, intitle them to lead the fashion in other vanities; so also, in this vilest of all abominations, *the forsaking the assemblies of the saints*; utterly neglecting the public worship, and *despising the Church of God*: the consequences of which are lamentable every way. For, whereas the Scriptures are, under God, the true and only sure source of virtue, the fountain-head of every thing that is exalted and excellent in our nature, for want of having these great ideas perpetually excited and revived in their minds, by attending to the public Prayers, and hearing the Scriptures constantly read in the Church, they gradually and daily languish in their souls, until at length they are utterly effaced and lost. They are in the condition of those artists, who, being long absent from *Rome*, have complained, that their ideas, both of painting and statuary, gradually decayed, and dege-

nerated in them, for want of having them perpetually renewed there, by those noblest originals of their arts. If these our travelling gentry had the same ingenuity, I am sure they might, with equal justice, complain, that they gradually sunk into sense, and mean, groveling selfish sentiments: that their ideas of every thing refined, and amiable, and excellent, gradually decayed and died within them, in proportion to their absence from the public worship of GOD; in proportion to their absence from those most edifying, most amending, and most ennobling lectures of heavenly wisdom, weekly, and daily published in the Church, in the Hymns and Psalms, the Liturgy and Litany, in the Epistles and Gospels, and Lessons of the day.

IT is strange and shocking, to see how these men delude themselves to their utter ruin. They have heard, that charity is the great and governing principle of the Christian Religion; and they imagine, that, if they have that, they have every thing: and they delude themselves

to think they have that, when they can talk plausibly of what they think equivalent to it, humanity, and social sentiments. They are men fond of the praises of virtue, but strangers to the power of it (as one of its late greatest enemies is well known to have written Rhapsodies and Panegyrics upon it). They have the terms Humane, and Benevolent, perpetually in their mouths; but they rarely reach their hearts. The terms are indeed sufficiently specious; but, in reality, mere *sounding brass, and tinkling cymbals*, substituted into the place of Christian charity: a principle from which no other could restrain us from believing their hearts utterly estranged. Can they think themselves humane, who never add one single mite to the weekly and monthly collections of the Church (in all other Christian regions of the earth but this, and), from the beginning of Christianity in the world, the surest, the best-judged, and best-conducted fund, by which all the wants and distresses of humanity are ordinarily relieved



relieved and supplied in the society ; and many of them so relieved, and only so relieved, even here \* ? Can they think themselves friends to virtue, who deliberately decline the noblest aids and incitements to it ; the public and united supplications of the faithful to the throne of God, for grace and guidance, to enlighten their souls, and incline their hearts to every social and Christian virtue ; to every office of humanity, to every impulse of charity, and every praise and practice of piety ? Can they seriously think themselves friends to virtue, who decline these aids and incitements to it, and discourage the hopes of inestimable rewards in heaven ? Can they think themselves benevolent, who, by steadily absenting themselves from the public worship of God, do all that in them lieth, to banish all awe and reverence of him from the earth ! to efface and to blot out true Religion from the hearts of men ! true Religion, the only sure cement of society ; the true, and, let me add,

\* All wants and distresses relieved by Briefts.



the only sure, fountain of glory to God on high, and on earth peace, good-will towards men.

BUT, suppose these men had charity, they little know the nature of Religion, who take that to be the whole of it: for charity respects only our duty to our neighbour; and the duties we owe to God, and to ourselves, are as truly essentials of Religion, as charity; and those we owe to God, are the basis of the whole.

THEY know little of Religion, who do not know, that the setting apart stated times for the public worship of God, and attending constantly upon it, is essential to the very being of Religion in the world; and therefore, when God declares to his people by the mouth of his prophet (*Ezek. xx. 19, 20.*), *I am the Lord thy God*, he immediately adds, as the necessary consequence of their acknowledging him in that character, *Walk in my statutes, keep my judgments, and hallow my Sabbaths.* Every Christian knows, that to love God, with all the heart, and all the soul, is the first and great

16 *On the* PRESENT NEGLECT

*great commandment ; and to love our neighbour as ourselves, the second : but there is this plain distinction in the point ; we are to love God, the Fountain of all goodness, and of all good to us, for his own sake, and man for his Maker's sake ; for reasons drawn from his authority and appointments. So that the love of God is the fundamental and ruling principle of all Religion ; and the Gospel hath added to this, the great essential of the Christian Religion, faith in Jesus Christ. Upon these two, thus considered, hang all the law, the prophets, the evangelists, and the apostles : and therefore St. Paul sums up the whole of his preaching, both to the Jewish and Gentile world, under these two great heads, repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance towards God, which implieth a detestation and confession of sin, a sincere love of God, and sorrow for offending him, and a fixt purpose of amendment and obedience for ever after — and faith in Christ, which implieth an humble and thankful acceptance*

ance of this blessed Son of GOD, as our great Saviour, and Sacrifice to the Divine Justice for our sins ; our great Redeemer, Reconciler, and Mediator with GOD. And whosoever wants these, wants the great fundamentals of true Religion ; and whosoever neglects the public worship of GOD, deliberately neglects both these, deliberately neglects the public confession of his sin, and the great duties consequent to his redemption ; and, by neglecting, naturally unlearns them all : and whosoever wants these fundamentals of Christianity, is an infidel ; and, as such, shall, at the last day, be cut off by his Lord, and *have his portion appointed him with the unbelievers*, St. *Luke*, xiith chap. 46th ver.

HAVING thus shewn you several sources of this crying guilt, the neglect of GOD's public worship, together with the great evils immediately arising from it ; I cannot however quit this subject, without laying some of its many other sad consequences more fully before you ;

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together with the blessings and advantages of the contrary behaviour.

AND, first, one dreadful consequence from this shameful neglect of GOD's public worship, is, that it unfits us for every other office of religion : it unqualifies us for calling down the surest aids, and highest of all consolations, to our country, in the day of its calamity ; inasmuch as it alienates us from GOD, and makes every office of religion, makes even our prayers, an abomination in his sight ; for so *Solomon* sadly assures us (*Prov. xxviii. v. 9.*), *He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination.*

FROM hence also, my brethren, from this shameful neglect of the public worship of GOD, as from its fountain-head, arises that utter disregard of the sacred writings, and avowed, or perhaps rather affected, contempt of the clergy, among the higher orders of men amongst us ; together with their unbounded and (GOD be praised !) ungrounded revilings of the whole order of the reformed Christian  
 3 priesthood ;



priesthood ; imputing to them, without shame, or colour of truth, every vice, every delusion, every evil art, that ever reigned in any order of priests, either in the times or scenes of papal tyranny, or heathen corruption ; and all this, with as little sensibility either to decency or justice, as if they branded every modest matron they met, with every abomination in the lives of a *Julia*, a *Messalina*, or a *Clytemnestra* ; proclaiming, at once, their own infamy, and either shameful insults upon truth, or gross affected ignorance ! If these men of superior talents (as they would be deemed) had talents to think freely and largely, they could not but see, that the law of the Sabbath is a law which demonstrates itself of divine original ; a law so calculated for the exigencies of the whole *Creation*, the preservation of true religion, and the relief of the labouring world, as clearly evinces it the work of infinite wisdom, benignity, and bounty ! a law to which every civility and virtue in life owes its origin and establishment ; and which, if



it ceased but one century from amongst us (for the seminaries of learning and religion would cease with it, or could not long survive it), would reduce the race of our vainest vaunters of wisdom into more than *Hottentot* barbarity; forasmuch as they would then have *Hottentot* ignorance super-added to native vice: and dare they pretend to any degree of humanity, who turn their backs upon the Sabbath, and do all that in them lieth, to banish this heavenly, this divine ordinance from the earth? to banish the blessed Sabbath, and with that the great blessings and civilities of life; the instruction of mankind in all the noblest ways of wisdom and virtue; the weekly and monthly relief of the poor, the only relief of many social distresses even here, and, in all other regions of the earth, the most extensive and only constant fund of Christian charity?—Dare they pretend to any degree of humanity, who would at once banish from the earth the light of true religion, the relief of want, and the rest from labour?

IF these vain refiners would allow themselves to attend the public worship of GOD with any degree of humility, they would soon come to see, and to feel, the divinity of the sacred writings; they would see the infinite goodness, wisdom, and mercy of the Creator, beaming through every page of them; they would then see and adore the *beauty of holiness*, the amiableness, and the excellency, of virtue: they would then *turn away their foot from their own pleasure*; from pursuing their own idle vanities, *upon GOD's holy-day*: they would then *call the Sabbath, a delight*; and the *Holy one of the Lord, honourable*; and would honour him (Isa. lviii. 13.): they would then see, that *wisdom was not born with them alone*; nor would die with them! they would then learn, *that the priest's lips still retain knowlege*; and that it would, sometimes, be no disgrace nor disadvantage to the wisdom of their lay-brethren, to *seek the law at his mouth*—in a word, they would then see the Christian priesthood, in their true character;

character; *ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God!* they would then see them, to be, at once, *the light,* and *the salt,* of the society; the true sources and guardians of true virtue, civility, and wisdom; and, seeing them in this light, would be so far from defaming their characters, vilifying their office, envying them the portion assigned by Almighty God for their maintenance, or oppressing them in the perception of it, that they would do every thing in their power, to make their lives easy, and their office honourable; at least, they would do so, if they had any remains of humanity, or public spirit; inasmuch as, by so doing, they would greatly (and perhaps more effectually, than by any other possible means whatsoever) promote, and provide for, the happiness and welfare of the whole community; which is inseparably linked and interwoven with that of the reformed Christian priesthood ---- An order of men, who neither have, nor can have, any views, interests, or dependences, separate from those of their lay brethren; but

but must perpetually rise, and fall, in every thing valuable to man, in one even, uniform proportion, to the prosperity or calamity of their country.---- And hence it is, that as the *Jewish priesthood* subsisted, in the main, upon the same foot with ours, the prophets have always considered their interests, as one and the same with those of their people---- I say, the prophets, who were not priests, nor partial to the priesthood, but the censors and checks of GOD upon them, have always considered the calamity of the people, as the calamity of the priest; and the prosperity of the people, as the prosperity of the priest. Thus, when *Joel* tells us, in the first chapter of his *Prophecy*, at the 9th verse, that *the priests, the Lord's ministers, mourn*; he immediately adds, *the field is wasted, the land mourneth*. ---- And when *Jeremiah* pronounceth, in the name of GOD, *I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness*, he immediately adds, *And my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the*

Lord



24 *On the* PRESENT NEGLECT

*Lord* -- And much more to the same purpose.

I HAVE been the longer upon this head, to remove those jealousies of the priesthood, which have artfully been sown, and malignantly spread and propagated, through the laity; to the great offence of truth, prejudice of christian charity, increase of irreligion, and infinite disadvantage of the public worship of GOD; which hath so long, and so shamefully, been neglected amongst us! a neglect which involves great guilt in it, and draws much greater, indeed draws every other, guilt after it; and of which, therefore, we should now sincerely and earnestly repent, *with weeping, and fasting, and prayer*, to make every other office of religion acceptable in the sight of GOD.

LET me not be understood, as if, by any thing I have said, I would exempt the priesthood from their share in this national guilt. I am afraid we may but too justly apply to many of them that denunciation of divine vengeance, pronounced



nounced by the prophet upon the priests of his age ; *If ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory to my Name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings.* That too many of the clergy (for, how few soever they may be, in reality they are still too many) are too often absent from the public worship of GOD ; that too many of them are cold, and careless, in celebrating the sacred offices of religion, in preaching the word of GOD, and pressing it upon the hearts and consciences of their hearers ; are sad truths ! And is it to be expected, that any thinking man will venerate them, who do not themselves venerate their Maker, as they ought ; who do not lay it to heart, to make his worship honourable, and his word powerful ; efficacious, to all the purposes of piety ; to make his word powerful, and *his praises glorious* upon the earth ? --- This, however, must be allowed, by their greatest enemies, that their charity failed not in the late day of distress --- that they dealt  
D *their*

*their bread to the hungry ; visited and relieved the fatherless, and the widow, in their afflictions ;* and that with a spirit so truly Christian, that no order of men amongst us had then reason to wish their incomes diminished, or their charity increased. They then clearly saw, that to wish the revenues of the reformed clergy diminished, were, in effect, to wish the miseries of mankind multiplied and unrelieved : which ever was, and ever will be, the case, to the end of the world.

HOWEVER, as the clergy have their share in this national guilt, it is but just they should have their full share in the national humiliation due to it — Therefore, *Let the priests, the ministers of GOD, weep between the porch and the altar ; and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach : let all orders and degrees, amongst us, rend their hearts, and not their garments, and turn unto the Lord our GOD, with sincere repentance, and true contrition of heart ; for he is gracious and merciful,*

*ful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil* ——— This we certainly do know, and he himself hath expressly pronounced the sentence, by his prophet *Ezekiel*, *Ezek. chap. xx. ver. 21.* That if we do not, both priests and people, *walk in his statutes, and keep his judgments, and hallow his Sabbaths,* I will pour out my fury upon them, saith the LORD, and accomplish mine anger against them.

LET us then, in the name of Jesus Christ, this moment, *lay aside every weight, and this sin that doth so easily beset us*; and let us draw near to GOD, with a contrite and true heart, and in full assurance of faith; *not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is*; but earnestly pouring out our united supplications to Almighty GOD, for his mercy to this Church and Nation; and for deliverance from the crying guilt of despising and insulting his Sabbaths,

28 *On the* PRESENT NEGLECT, &c.

Sabbaths, and the just and dreadful vengeance due to it — From this guilt, and this vengeance, God, of his infinite mercy, deliver us all, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ.

*F I N I S.*